



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

more advanced courses can assume a certain amount of knowledge as something on which to build.

RICHARD T. ELY

UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN

---

### THE GENERAL COURSE A CITIZENSHIP COURSE

Students who take the elementary course in economics from their interest in the subject include those who take only the elementary course and those who take it as a preliminary to more or less specialization.

It is sometimes assumed that the interests of the two classes of students mentioned can be met only by courses different in content and method of teaching. For students who are taking the course as their only work in the subject, it is held by some that what is needed is a general survey, including a treatment of all topics in the field of economics; while for the second class of students—those who are taking the course for later specialization—the best course is not a microcosmic view of the field, but a “thorough grounding in principles” as a basis for their future intense specialization on the supposition that their future specialized courses will supply for them the complete survey that is desirable.

The advocates of the latter point of view buttress their position by saying that the first plan emphasizes the knowledge of the subject, while the second emphasizes the importance of training.

A disinterested teacher or student, however, is likely to ask whether the two views are really inconsistent. A proper answer can be given only by asking some other questions. We need to know, first of all, the educational needs of the students. Why do two or three hundred young men and women fill up the classroom in the course in elementary economics? For what do they want the course? A few of them are to become “economists.” That is to say, they are to teach and write economics. They are to be specialists. A larger number will probably teach the subject either by itself, or in connection with history or civics in the secondary schools or smaller colleges. Far the largest number of the

group, however, are taking the course for an entirely different purpose. They are seeking education for life, for citizenship; and to them the course in general economics has a peculiar value for this purpose. This is a purpose that is common to all the members of the class, including future teachers and specialists in the subject. Therefore, it would seem to be the purpose which should dominate and determine the content of the course and the method of its presentation. Hence, we may conclude that the general elementary course in economics should be, first of all, a citizenship course. It should aim to give the students such a knowledge of the facts and principles of economic science as will enable them to take intelligent views of, and form intelligent opinions upon, public and private matters of an economic character. Whatever else such a course may do, if it fails in some measure at least to do this, I should pronounce the course a failure.

For this purpose, the course should be a microcosmic presentation of economic life. I am assuming, of course, that time enough is given for the course, and I believe that a daily class for one semester is sufficient. It seems to me that the student who is to go on with advanced courses—the prospective specialist—also needs this preliminary microcosmic view of the field for the purpose of getting a notion of economic science as a whole, and its divisions and their relationships. Indeed, it is my opinion that no student can get the most out of an advanced special course unless he has done this beforehand.

The course should train the student, so to speak, to “think economics,” to handle economic data logically, to reason about them, and to make proper inferences from them. It should enable the person who takes it to apply economic principles to the events of daily life. It should, therefore, give him the basis of knowledge and training necessary to form intelligent judgments about the economic questions of the day. If our course does not succeed in doing this it becomes a case of dry bones. The day has passed when the study of any subject in the college course can be fairly or fully justified on the mere ground that it affords good “mental training.” The college student cannot afford to spend his time merely sharpening his tools without reference to

the kind of edge they need to serve the uses to which they are to be put. It is entirely possible to get all the good mental training desirable from the study of subjects which at the same time stimulate interest.

There has been some discussion of the question whether the course should deal largely with economic history or with economic principles. The furor with which the advocates of the historical method twenty years ago insisted on economic history has borne fruit in a crop of textbooks whose authors have thought it necessary to devote fifty or one hundred pages to the economic history of England and of the United States. In no one of them is the history made use of later on as a means of establishing principles. The history is inserted in deference to the demand for knowledge of historical facts, but no logical connection is established between these facts and the principles afterward presented. The result has been not only disappointing, but injurious. The only value of a separate treatment of economic history in a textbook of economics lies in its utility for emphasizing the relativity, or changing character, of economic institutions. For that purpose much less of it is needed than we usually find in the books. The course should be, indeed, rich in historical illustration. That is, the facts of the past and present should be used to test and establish the principles stated, if the analytical method is followed. We need a textbook as rich in this way as is Smith's *Wealth of Nations*.

As to method of presentation, shall we state the general principles and explain them with abundant illustrations, or shall we follow the concrete method? Shall our treatment be analytical or synthetic?

It seems to the writer that the correct answer depends not only on the consideration of what constitutes the most logical presentation of the science, but also on the maturity of the students and the personality of the teacher. What is first in logical analysis, as has often been remarked, may be last in psychological importance, and vice versa. With very young students, or with older students, like engineers for example, who

have been accustomed to concrete or inductive methods of study, it may be better to begin, at any rate, with that method. An accumulation by the student of carefully selected facts which can be so handled as to lead to a principle, or theory, is stimulating; and it really makes little difference at what part of the science one first dips in, although of course there is some value in a systematic presentation. One might begin with the study of money and banking simply because that subject lends itself in part, at least, to treatment by the synthetic method. It is possible, after an elementary consideration of the principles of exchange, to pass directly to production—the products which the money and banking institutions exchange—or to almost any topic in distribution. Or, a start may be made with the study of farm production and organization, with the study of the economic causes influencing the location of a railway, or some such topic. With the ordinary college class of sophomores in arts and sciences, however—the one with which the writer has mostly to deal—the aim has been to make a systematic presentation, beginning with production, in the ordinary way. Constant effort is made, however, to draw illustrations from past and present practices and institutions with which the students are familiar, or can easily become familiar, in order to arouse and maintain interest. Consequently, the writer prefers a book full of human interest, even if lacking somewhat in orderliness of logical presentation, to one which lacks the human element, but, from the point of view of the character of the science, is scientifically exact and systematic. With sophomores and students of that grade the stimulation of interest is all important if we are to avoid giving them a lasting impression that after all economics is a “dismal science.” The college student likes to think. Therefore, he should grapple with principles, using description and history for illustration and as “laboratory material.” It is a mistake to give him merely the dry bones of economic anatomy.

DAVID KINLEY